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Editorial

Species and Sub-species

I have written earlier that the Newsletter would avoid getting into the problem of sub-species as a general policy. We have enough species to enjoy and worry about. Why split hairs unnecessarily?

However, in this issue you will see a very worthwhile article by Bharat Bhushan on the subject of sub-species. But what he really emphasises is the importance of looking at birds, even common birds, carefully and thus enjoying them all the more.

Rather unexpectedly I received a letter from Edward Dickenson as a result of correspondence initiated by Kumar Ghorpade. Dickenson is connected with the National Museum of Natural

History of the Netherlands, and has been “very busy editing and completely revising and updating the Harvard and Moore check lists of birds of the world, a work that includes sub-species”. He has been exploring the possibility of producing a Handbook of Asian Birds which at the moment has been held up because of lack of funds. I quote some portions of his letter which may be of interest to our readers :

“Taxonomy has been a highly neglected subject in ornithology for years. Only this week I heard that a new sub-species had been described in Pacific Science by Jared Diamond earlier this year, because *The Emu* rejected his paper on the ground that it did not now publish papers on taxonomy!.....

I do share a couple of core views that Kumar has expressed. First, the quality of taxonomic work on Asian birds including Indian birds, has been patchy, and a lot remains to be done. Second, in the course of the last 60 years the trend towards lumping has created species that are sometimes ill-conceived and genera that needs splitting.. Kumar is almost certainly right in thinking that a good few birds that have populations in Peninsular India that are separated by huge range gaps from the forms of the Himalayas and South East Asia deserve studying with a view to showing that differentiation has occurred to the point when specific recognition could be justified.

What is undeniable now compared to the middle of the last century is that we have more “tools” available to assess relationships, some of these may be helpful in the context of separated allopatric (having different areas of distribution taxa). Perhaps the first to come to mind is song: there is a body of acoustic evidence that is convincing in some cases although there is much to learn about song dialect and about the pitfalls of playback experiments and judgements made thereupon.

The next to come to mind is molecular study: this, I believe, is unquestionably useful in terms of sorting out family relationships, genetic evaluation and in the context of species and sub-species for documenting the situation in cases of sympathy (with areas of distribution which coincide or overlap) and parapatry where clear but small differences in genetic make-up should be meaningful.

“The third area for evidence to emerge is colour diagnosis: spectrometers now allow us to see plumage in ways that we do not normally see it but that birds may. If there are really distinctions here that would seem likely to affect mate selection then clearly the evidence needs to be put forward.” Perhaps I am wrong in having a bias against sub-species.

The small green bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*)

In his fascinating article in The Hindu (1.9.02) Theodore Baskaran makes a comment which is worth pursuing. Writing about a nesting pair of small bee-eaters (formerly named Indian small green bee-eater) he says:

“Bee- eaters have worked out a foolproof security system for the nest. When one bird goes into the tunnel with food for the nestlings, the other sits near the mouth of the tunnel and keeps up a distinct call which seems to tell the bird inside that everything is alright outside. In the face of danger, the sentry flies away and the call stops. The bird inside senses danger and rushes out. They both return when the threat has passed.” Do other species also follow this security strategy?

The Annual Gathering of Subscribers and Supporters of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

We plan to meet at Dodda Gubbi on Sunday, 19th January 2003. As usual Major & Dr. Mrs. B.M. Appachu have placed their farm and facilities at our disposal.

Please see the note appended with this issue.



On the Identification of the Mahratta Myna *Acridotheres fuscus mahrattensis* (Sykes)

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Did you know that there is a Mahratta Myna? Most birders know about the Mahratta or the yellowfronted pied woodpecker *Picoides mahrattensis* (Latham) now known as the yellow-crowned woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*. There is also the Sind or Syke's nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*. The mahratta woodpecker is not a true Maratha, being found widespread east of the Indus River. The Sind nightjar ranges from Afghanistan through Pakistan, western India through the Deccan to Mysore, and cannot be considered to be a Mahratta. The Southern jungle myna or the Mahratta myna however has never been considered to be worthy to be a Maratha.

The species was described from collections in the Western ghats near Pune and thus received its initial name, *Pastor mahrattensis*. Colonel Sykes described the mahratta Myna in 1832 initially as a separate species in the proceedings of the Zoological Society of London (Sykes 1832 a). He seems to have also described for science in the same year, i.e., 1832, the sind nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis* (Sykes 1832b). Sykes was one of the first group of serious field workers in ornithology in the Indian Subcontinent, along with Adams, Franklin, Hutton, McClelland, Tickell and Tytler. During the first six decades of the nineteenth century, this group had peers such as T.C. Jerdon, Brian Hodgson and Edward Blyth (Ali and Ripley 1983). Apart from the birdskin collections of A.O. Hume, vast collections such as those of Col. Sykes, the Marquis of Tweeddale (Viscount Walden), and Mr. John Gould, are now housed in the British Museum collection of Indian Birds. Colonel William Henry Sykes was a remarkable naturalist and an excellent birder. I hope to write about him in a future manuscript.

The Mahratta myna is now a subspecies of the much better known jungle myna, *Acridotheres fuscus*. The nominate subspecies was described only five years earlier in 1827 by Wagler as *Pastor fuscus* (Wagler 1827). Subsequently *Pastor mahrattensis* was listed as *Acridotheres fuscus mahrattensis* (Table 1: Key to *Acridotheres tristis* and *A. fuscus* and their subspecies). For purposes of the discussion in this document, I shall refer to the Southern jungle myna as the Mahratta myna, and I hope that the name stays in the future.

The mystery of the ability to identify the Mahratta myna lies in the paradox of wanting to distinguish the species separately from the common myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Table 2: Comparative characteristics of *Acridotheres tristis* and *A. fuscus*). Now who cannot identify the common myna? Any beginner can do so. Even, blindfolded. True, its call is characteristic, and one of the best known of all through the Indian subcontinent. And if other documents are to be referred to, the bird is also now feared in the southern nations in Africa and Australia. It has become a pest in most of these regions.

Prakash Gole Prize :

Prakash Gole has donated a Thousand rupees to the Newsletter and with his consent I thought we might award this amount to the author of the best article during 2002. The best is a matter of opinion, and the opinion of the Editor will be announced in the Jan/Feb 2003 issue.

Table 1 : Key to the species and subspecies of *Acridotheres tristis* and *Acridotheres fuscus*, Abstract from the Handbook (Ali and Ripley 1983).

Key to the Species

A	Sides of head partly bare, Under wingcoverts and axillaries white.	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
B	No bare skin on sides of head. No collar on sides of nest. Base of mandible blackish.	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>

Key to the Subspecies of *Acridotheres tristis* and *Acridotheres fuscus* (Amadon 1956)

A.1	Not so dark above; primary-coverts entirely white.	<i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i>
A.2	Much darker above; primary-coverts half black and half-white.	<i>Acridotheres tristis melanosternus</i>
B.1	Upperparts slaty; iris yellow.	<i>Acridotheres fuscus fuscus</i> and <i>Acridotheres fuscus fumidus</i>
B.1.A	Lighter, particularly on rump, and less smoky on abdomen.	<i>Acridotheres fuscus fuscus</i>
B.1.B	Darker above, more smoky on abdomen.	<i>Acridotheres fuscus fumidus</i>
B.2	Upperparts brown; iris grey, bluish white or pale blue.	<i>Acridotheres fuscus mahrattensis</i>

The problem lies in the fact that most birders seem to be blindfolded when it comes to identifying the Mahratta myna when it is absolutely common, in more numbers, feeding alongside the common myna, and acting like a pest at garbage dumps, hotel waste dumps and market yards. This may perhaps be due to the belief that the Jungle myna should logically be in, where else, the jungle! It should not be popping up regularly in open sighting inside cities. Why would it be called the jungle myna if it were to be commonly found inside cities? How could a forest dwelling bird, as its name signifies, be found commonly at garbage dumps? Distinguishing!

The impact of urban growth around forest areas, especially in hilly terrain, is perhaps the answer to this disconcerting mystery. I have been watching the jungle or Mahratta myna in Pune city since 1996. It seems to occur along with the common myna in the areas around Baner, Pashan, Audh, Raj Bhavan campus and the University of Pune campus. Both the species are seen to occur commonly in these semi-suburban area of Pune west of Shivaji Nagar. I am currently working at the Yeshwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration. The academy has a

Table 2: Comparative description of the field characters and museum diagnosis of Indian myna *Acridotheres tristis tristis* (Handbook No. 1006. Volume 5 pages 177-180), and the southern jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus mahrattensis* (Handbook No. 1010. Volume 5 pages 185-186)

Description as in the Handbook	Indian myna <i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i> Handbook Number 1006	Southern Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus mahrattensis</i> Handbook Number 1010
Size	Dove : Length c.23 cm (9in)	Myna; length c. 23 cm (9in)
Field Character	Well-groomed dark brown bird with glossy black head and bright yellow legs, bill and a naked patch below and behind eye. A large white patch on the wing conspicuous in flight. Sexes alike.	As on 1009(Northern Jungle Myna) <i>Acridotheres fuscus fuscus</i> Very similar to Indian Myna (1006), also with the large white wing- patch but distinctly greyer brown overall. A prominent tuft of erect black feathers at base of bill on forehead, absence of bare yellow skin around eyes, broadly white-tipped tail and yellow iris are diagnostic clues. Sexes alike.
Young (immature)	Pale edition of adult; duller, less dark brown, with the head ashy brown rather than black.	Like <i>fuscus</i> (1009) but browner above and below. <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i> Young immature = Upperparts brown to greybrown, darkest on head which is not hackled; ear-coverts with pale shafts. Underparts brown with pale mottling on throat; belly and under tail-coverts buffish white. Tail-feathers narrower, dark brown with white tips as in adult. Postjuvinal mouth complete.
Museum Diagnosis	Head, neck and upper breast glossy black; rest rich vinous brown, paler and albescent on abdomen. A large white patch at base of dark brown primaries. Tail brownish black with broad white tips to the rectrices.	Differs from the northern (nominate) subspecies in being more brown, less slaty grey on the upperparts and in the colour of the iris: grey or bluish white v. lemon-yellow. <i>Acridotheres fuscus fuscus</i> Museum Diagnosis = Adult. Whole head, lores and ear-coverts black, the feathers of the head hackled. Rest of upperparts cinereous brown becoming greyer with wear. Below, chin, throat and breast dark ashy grey; belly and under tail-coverts buffish white.
Geo-graphical variation	Birds from NW India tend to Paleness, from S. India to darkness.	Not mentioned or specified.
Colour of bare parts	Iris brown or reddish brown mottled with white; Orbital skin bright yellow. Bill yellowish, base of lower mandible brownish green; mouth dark slate. Legs, feet and claws, yellow like bill, paler than orbital skin.	Irish bluish white or grey. Bill orange yellow, dark brown at nostrils, gape and base of lower mandible; mouth dark slate. Legs and feet yellow; claws brown..
Other Sub-species	1007. Ceylon Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis melanosternus</i> Legge.	1009, Northern Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i> (Wagler) 1011. Eastern Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus fumidus</i> Ripley



beautiful garden campus, with patches of new lawn landscape interspersed with the original Deccan semi-arid trees of *Zizyphus* and *Acacia* along with Teak and Bamboo. In fact, we have some of the best looking *Zizyphus* trees instead of the usual stunted bush-like apologies that one sees all over the Deccan.

An even more delightful Raj bhavan campus, the Superintendent of Police (Rural) campus and the University of Pune surround the Academy. Further west, the Spicer Memorial College in Aundh has more than 80 acres of trees, agricultural areas and groves, bordered by the Botanical Gardens. Towards the southwest, we have the nearly 200 acre campus of the National Chemical Laboratory before the Pashan road climbs towards the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla. All in all, a splendid location for birding.

Our campus now has a checklist of more than 100 bird species. The Pashan-Aundh-Baner area could easily present a checklist of more than 150 bird species. Of these, the most common species in our campus include redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, spotted munia *Lonchura punctula*, magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*, large grey babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*, grey or great tit *Parus major* and purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* among others. Of the mynas in the Pashan-Aundh-Baner area of Pune. I have recorded the common myna, the jungle or Mahratta myna, the brahminy myna *Sturnus pagodarum*, and the rosy pastor *Sturnus roseus*. I have never seen the bank myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*, the pied myna *Sturnus contra* or the Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* in this region during 1996-2002.

The common myna is quite bold within our campus, feeding near the residential areas, entering my office cabin, chattering outside the classrooms, entering houses through open windows or insisting for morsels outside kitchen windows. It is seen to be most aggressive near the open garbage bins against pariah dogs, house crows *Corvus splendens* and crow pheasant *Centropus sinensis* that frequent the spot. The common myna nests in the caves under the sloping tiled roofs of our campus buildings. It can be quite intimidating for the nesting birds, for our tiled roofs are known to house civets, snakes, mongoose and several rats and bandicoots. I have been watching at least four pairs of common mynas successfully raising broods each year since 1996. This year we retiled the roofs and boarded up the caves to prevent the snakes, civets and mongoose from wandering around. The common myna did not nest under the tiled roofs this year I could only spot two pairs successfully nesting behind an unused airconditioner inside a rarely utilised classroom.

Pune city has a number of well known and some not so well known communal roosts of common mynas. One can therefore see flocks of 7-10 common mynas flying in to the inner city and suburbs from the outlying agricultural areas. Some locations such as the Spicer Memorial College campus, the Salisbury Park campus and the Durgadevi Hill Forests are known to have communal roosts of common mynas of more than 2000 birds.

The point is that most birders know the common myna quite commonly in Pune. Some birders know that the evening flocks flying in are going to the roosts. Almost all birders never give a second glance to the flying flocks or the communal roosts as also the mynas seen all over the city. Thus, they do not seem to realise that in some flocks or alongside some, there occurs the Mahratta myna.

Even as I write this manuscript at 1430 hours on 6 August 2002, I can see two Mahratta mynas scampering behind our campus gardeners who have been sweeping up the cut down grass from our lawns. There are another four Mahratta mynas perched on a neem tree next to a tiled roof house inside our campus. These four have been perched on the neem branches over the past 30 minutes and do not seem rushed for foraging. As part of the same picture, within the frame, there are ten common mynas hassling themselves while following the gardeners. The common mynas are flying up almost seeming to compete within themselves in trying to be the first in the queue. The two Mahratta mynas seem to be quite content foraging slowly, digging up the soil with their beaks and picking up something now and then and allowing for it to be swallowed.

Local birders from within the city usually visit me at my office and residence, both inside the campus. There are several *atirathis* and *mahrathi* birders, i.e. experienced and expert birders, in the city. I purposefully seat them in a position where they could watch the feeding areas for the birds visiting my house. When it was almost time for them to depart, I point out the fact that there seemed to be two different mynas feeding in front of us. One seemed to be slimmer, darker, with even more grey-brown wings and without the bright yellow naked patch behind the eye. Would that not be a different species? The expert birder immediately point out the white wing patch on both the myna species and lecture to me on the fact that it was proof enough that both were common mynas.

Most possibly, aggrieved birders from Pune and nearby regions would respond to this manuscript. Some may disclaim my theory that we are not taking the time to separately identify the Mahratta myna from the common myna. Some may agree. It would certainly be worthwhile to see the response and reactions.

What makes the Mahratta myna so indistinguishable from the common myna? I am unable to explain with any degree of certainty. I have tried discussing this problem with birders in other cities. They agree that the jungle myna could be seen inside the cities but do not seem to have spotted the species along with the common myna around garbage dumps, gardens, residential areas, kitchen windows or balconies, vegetable markets and classrooms. Is this a new phenomenon? Has it been seen in cities other than in Pune? Is the jungle myna beginning to be urbanised? Or, simply speaking, have we given it a wrong name?

Just because we have named it the jungle myna should the species restrict its distribution to forests? And more disturbingly, has urban impact on nearby forests become so pronounced that the most opportunistic birds such as mynas, bulbuls have begun to enter cities?

These questions need to be discussed. The perspectives and concerns that the species has highlighted needs to be studied in detail. Within the scope of this manuscript however, I am more concerned by the amazing carelessness being exhibited by the birding community in taking some more time and understanding the fact that however repetitive it may be, each bird needs to be looked at in detail and importantly, with unending curiosity. A birders' credo is to seek knowledge again and again, in looking at each bird, however common it may be. There is a lot of action in the most boring looking flock of house sparrows. Each pair of house crows seems to behave differently. Every sunbird seems to have a different perspective to each flower that it visits. There is something different every single moment with the same species, with the same individual bird, with the same flock and within the same habitat.

Let us all take some more time. Let us enjoy birding a little bit more. Let us not rush it. There was a statement that used to be repeated during 1983-1984 during the Centenary year of the Bombay Natural History Society. "The best things in the world are free, enjoy it while you can." I may not be recollecting this statement accurately. We need to place this statement alongside the famous lines from the poem, "What is this world full of care, we have no time to stand and stare". It would then definitely indicate to birders everywhere that birdwatching can be enjoyed that much more only if we regard each bird as something different to look at, different to be observed, different to be identified.

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A brief visit was made to the Talakona area of the Sri Venkateswara National Park near Tirupati in the Chittoor district of A.P. during 24-25 August 2002, as part of an educational tour for the Biology Students of class 12 of Rishi Valley School. I have visited other parts of the National park such as the Pulibonu area and Kalyani Dam, Mamandur etc., since 1980 and have always enjoyed watching birds in these forests. Having heard about the unique vegetation of the Talakona area, I had been longing to visit it and explore its bird-life.

Located about 25 km. from Bakrapet, a small village on the Tirupati – Madanapalle road, Talakona is on the northwestern

A Visit to the Talakona Forest

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part of the National Park which is some 353 km² in area. The forest commences as one approaches Talakona from Nerabailu village, some 7 km. ahead of the Siddeswara temple. Initially the forest is nothing more than a degraded scrub but as we go in along the road we begin to see better preserved dry deciduous forest, having *Terminalia* spp., *Santalum*, *Pterocarpus* (red sanders), *Chloroxylon*, *Phoenix*, bamboos, etc. There is a dramatic change in the vegetation along the riverine area where the trees assume gigantic proportions as compared with the adjacent dry deciduous forest that has smaller and less dense vegetation. Here in the gallery forests, trees are well over 100-120 ft (30-35 m.) in height and have large girths. An

exceptionally large tree we measured had a diameter of 56 inches (c. 140 cm.). This forest-type, which came close to the moist deciduous type in its physiognomy as well as its floristics, has several species of trees distinct from the dry forests. Wild mango (*Mangifera indica*) is the most common tree. Among other trees seen here are *Shorea* spp. (a few were supposedly planted several years ago by the Britishers), *Syzigium alternifolium*, *Ficus* spp. and *Dillenia pentagyna*. A notable feature of the forest here is the presence of the woody climber or liana – *Entada scandens*. A plant of truly gigantic proportions, this plant grows on the trees and in some places we could see trees that were unable to bear their enormous weight, brought down to the ground along with parts of the liana. Only dead stumps of these trees remain, in a high state of decay. The undergrowth is fairly dense in patches in the gallery forest though open in some parts. *Helicteres isora* is a common shrub.

The gallery forest is a narrow belt along the river and not wider than some 5-600 m. at the widest point. The river was in flow though the volume was very low due to the erratic monsoon rains. From the temple the road becomes rough and runs to the base of the near vertical cliff-face and terminates. From here one has to walk a kilometer along the river to reach the 'kona' or the waterfall. A truly spectacular cascade in rainy season, it was now reduced to a small, narrow ribbon of water. The exposed rocks of the cliffs are also very picturesque, giving an ancient look to the narrow valleys. Walking along the stream beds, one could view the geological and biological sights with fascination. The flaky rocks, vertical as a wall with symmetrically carved step-like formations with water flowing down and supporting ferns and herbs, the tall magnificent trees with lianas with their enormous pods, nearly a meter in length at times, the delicately built spider webs glistening in the sunlight, the calls of a multitude of birds are all part of fondly cherished memories that will linger on for a long time to come.

The vegetation being strongly reminiscent of the forests of Western Ghats, it was not surprising that the fauna it supported also had some elements from this area. The giant squirrels were seen commonly on the trees, though they appeared to be somewhat smaller and less bright than those I have seen in the Western Ghats. They were less shy and more easily approachable. Among birds there were the yellow-browed bulbul, the green imperial pigeon, the quaker babbler and the grey-fronted green pigeon, which one associates closely with the forests of the W. Ghats. Perhaps there were several other species too but to document their presence one needs more than the few hours that were at my disposal. In fact, I could manage to document only 48 species of birds on this visit. The visibility was certainly low in the gallery forest and with a garrulous group of teenagers around, it was certainly impossible to hear all the birdcalls.

The birds in the gallery forests appeared to be either concentrated in the fruiting jamun (*Syzigium*) trees or moving about in mixed hunting flocks. The assemblage on the former included the

grey-fronted green pigeon, tree-pie, large green barbet, red-vented, red-whiskered and the yellow-browed bulbuls, the gold-mantled chloropsis and a few others. In the mixed flocks, there were white-bellied drongos, black-headed orioles, slaty-headed scimitar babblers, monarch, tickell's blue, white-spotted fantail and paradise flycatchers, quaker babblers, small minivets, white-browed and yellow-browed bulbuls. These were occasionally joined by the black-backed and lesser golden-backed woodpeckers. The drongo appeared to be at the centre of the flock and by following its movements the rest of the birds could be spotted. It was usually seen in the lower to mid-canopy heights. The flycatchers too were at the same levels. The fantail flycatcher was seen taking insects from the tree-trunks. The quaker babblers were foraging at lower heights, among the shrubs and at times as low as a few inches above the ground. The bulbuls and the orioles were at higher levels, amongst the foliage. I got to see a single green imperial pigeon fly past and later located two more high up in the canopy. Their deep calls were also heard briefly.

Large cuckoo-shrikes kept to family parties and up to four birds were seen together and appeared to be engaged in courtship displays. The large green barbets were constantly heard from among the tree-tops. The coppersmith barbet was relatively less often encountered. Spotted babbler and jungle babblers were also noticed. It was a delight to hear the shama's call-notes and 2-3 birds were briefly glimpsed. The other notable birds seen on the trip were the white-throated ground thrush, an adult bird followed by a juvenile that was fed by the former, a lovely specimen of the black eagle soaring effortlessly above the canopy, the yellow-throated bulbul, our endemic bird from this region, common grey hornbill, a brown flycatcher and a pair of gold-fronted chloropsis of which I had only a brief look and hence not too sure of. The river had very few birds apart from the small blue and white-breasted kingfishers. I had faintly heard the call of the Indian cuckoo once from a little distance away. There were of course the other birds like the common lora, brown wood-shrike, tailorbird, rose-ringed and blossom-headed parakeets, purple-rumped sunbird, coucal, Indian robin, tickell's flowerpecker, spotted dove and franklin's prinia from the dry deciduous forest. But I really missed a few others such as the grey jungle fowl and owls (especially the brown fish owl) that I had hoped to see here.

The Talakona area has much to offer to the serious birdwatchers. It is a pity that very little is known of its rich birdlife. There could be surprises here as in the case of the yellow-browed bulbul and grey-fronted green pigeon – species till recently not reported from the Eastern Ghats. There is accommodation at Talakona, run by the AP Tourism as well as the Forest Department, though there are few takers due to the naxalite activities. This incidentally is keeping the tourist population here at lower levels and reducing the level of disturbance. Even so plastics and paper could be seen littered all over the place. Steps must be taken to tackle this menace to maintain the pristine beauty of this lovely forest.



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Macro and Micro Ecosystems

Innumerable sanctuaries and National Parks have been created in the country for preserving wild animals, birds and vegetation. These extend over hundreds of hectares; and are situated far away from human populated areas. Happily these serve as a repository of biodiversity. They may be addressed as macro habitats and ecosystems for certain wildlife and plants. All the same we come across pockets or niches, may be a single tree, a small group of vegetation, small rocks or big boulders, even river and other water courses, where small animals and birds are seen breeding. These may be the micro habitats, which form miniature eco-systems for certain animals and birds to survive and breed. Such niches and solitary trees or rocks also need protection for the survival of the species.

Among the trees, scientists consider Ficus trees (Fig species) as 'Keystone species', the species that have large ramifying effects on the ecosystem through direct and indirect pathways. These are the species which control the structure and function of a community of animals. Like a keystone supporting an archway, keystone plants like various Ficus species bear fruits all year round, and so support a broad spectrum of frugivorous birds and animals during times of scarcity of food. In an observation two different species of squirrels and about twenty different species of birds were seen on a 'Gonimara' (*Ficus mysorensis*), when in fruit. Extinction of keystone species is likely to cause major changes in the composition of species. A group of Ficus trees of various species offer fruits for animals and birds spread over several months. These serve as super-markets for these animals, where they get various types of frugivorous food as at a single super-market people get all their requirements. Hence it is environmentally necessary to maintain viable flowering (nectar bearing) and fruiting (edible) populations of plant species for the health of biodiversity, both in the rural (including forests) and urban environs.

Against this background, orders have been recently issued to preserve all the Ficus trees found growing in Bangalore, thanks to years of efforts of our editor Zafar Futehally. This will go a long way in preserving the bird-diversity of the city.

In forest areas rich populations of frugivorous bird species frequent Ficus trees like *F. mysorensis* (Gonimara), *F. glomerata* (Country fig), *F. Tsiela* (Piperi), *F. religiosa* (Peepal), and even *F. benghalensis*, the last if found wild at the fringes. Ficus trees are normally considered to be infectious to other valuable species like Teak by the forest officials and are cut down. But in view of their importance to biodiversity, they need to be preserved. Some of these trees growing to giant size in the forests individually support birds, animals, wild beehives etc. to breed and multiply. I have observed a pair of the lesser adjutant-stork nesting (this need not be taken as the same pair, but a single pair only breeds here) since the last thirty years on a giant tree growing at the edge of the ancient Bisalavadi water-hole at the Nagarahole National Park of Karnataka.

Occasionally many ancient giant Ficus trees found planted outside our forests on the roadsides serve as micro-nesting places for the birds. There is a *Ficus religiosa* tree (Peepal) at Mattikere, on the Bangalore-Mysore road, on which grey herons and little

cormorants nest year after year. Different species of owls are observed breeding in the hollows of the ancient trees of Ficus, Tamarind, Neem, Mohwa, Jamun etc. planted as avenue trees along the highways and other ancient roads of our country, many of which are being axed down during the upgradation of roads to four and six lanes of 623 km. length coming under the Golden Quadrilateral Project of the Central Govt. The parakeets, especially the rose-ringed ones, and the barbets are observed residing and breeding in several holes made on the older trees in the vicinity of villages as well.

At the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary Fruit Bats yearly breed in hundreds on the same 3-4 giant trees of *Ficus benghalensis* along with other nesting birds. At this sanctuary cliff swallows are also observed nesting in hundreds on a single rock since several decades.

I have observed and photographed a pair of the common hoopoe using the same nesting hole of a low-growing tree in the compound of the Deputy Conservator of Forests at Mysore. This will continue, if no disturbance is caused to the birds.

It is quite natural for most of the bird-watchers to go for birding to some common larger trees, especially fruit bearing trees, where on a single tree they observe a large congregation of birds of various species like the mynas, bulbuls, parakeets, drongos, barbets, hornbills etc. Some trees, specially the giant and taller ones, are utilised as the roosting places for a large number of birds. In the evenings a large gathering of noisy birds is observed on such trees to the delight of the birdwatchers. Even water and wader birds have community roosting on certain selected trees, either in rural or urban areas, year after year, if disturbance is not caused. Birdwatchers should have also observed the raptors selecting the same trees for roosting, breeding or predating over the years.

At the Gund and Magod forests of Uttara Kannada District the great hornbills nest on the same tall giant trees every year. At the Anaimalai Sanctuary of Tamilnadu the great hornbills breed on tall giant trees and mostly feed on wild Ficus fruits. Likewise the Malabar grey hornbill, the Malabar pied hornbill and the great black woodpeckers are seen occupying certain niches in the reserved forests, which do not come under the Sanctuaries.

Along some riverbanks, streams and tanks kingfishers like the stork-billed kingfisher, the lesser pied kingfisher the small blue kingfisher etc. are seen breeding in the same holes over the years. There are rocks in the rivers surrounded by water that are used by river terns and great stone plovers for annual nesting.

Purple sunbirds affect the scrub country around even cities and are observed nesting on the dwarf *Acacia* plants covered with the social spider-cobwebs.

I have recorded a few sightings of the forest habitats, individual trees, groups of vegetation, rocks and boulders, river and stream banks, watercourses etc. which are being used by birds and animals as sites for breeding. Most of these fall outside the Protected Areas, which also need listing and protection against human-destruction. Our bird-watching friends should have spotted such sites of breeding, which need proper listing.



Status of Vultures in Etawah and Mainpuri Districts, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Vulture declines have been cataclysmic in their proportions in several areas in India in the recent past. I had the opportunity to watch four species of vultures in the districts of Etawah and Mainpuri Districts, Uttar Pradesh, in north-central India.

This article documents semi-qualitative information on the status of these vultures in these two districts based on my observations between September 1999 to July 2002. These two districts have been under-explored for birds in the recent past, and reports of vultures in particular from this area have been few (Birdlife International 2000).

Fieldwork was conducted at the border of the two districts encompassing the towns of Etawah, Karhal, Saman, Sarsai nawar and Baralokpur. I travelled a route of approximately 250 km in length 5-7 times a week, and all observations were opportunistic. In addition, I conducted a survey of birds in the National Chambal Sanctuary in February 2002 at the request of the Forest Department and the numbers of vultures sighted were recorded; part of Agra district was covered during this survey. Sight records and relevant comments for the four species for the two districts and those recorded during the survey in Agra are presented in Table 1 and discussed species - wise below.

Scavenger vultures *Neophron percnopterus* Scavenger vultures were common in the area and could be frequently spotted in the countryside. Only records of unusually large flocks and numbers in the National Chambal Sanctuary during the bird survey are mentioned in Table 1. Breeding was prolific and occurred principally on the ledges of the ravines of the Chambal and Yamuna rivers, though several nests active on trees along main roads were recorded. Sightings of several juveniles with flocks indicated high rates and good success in breeding of the species in the area (see Table 1). They were attracted to soft-shelled turtle *Lissemys punctata* and monitor lizards *Varanus* sp. kills on roads and were usually the first on the scene, beating crows that are fast becoming the most prominent scavengers in the landscape along with stray dogs. In the northern part of Mainpuri district and in the adjoining Etah district, scavenger vultures were killed frequently by vehicles as they came down to feed on other animals killed by vehicles on roads. Dogs often chased away scavenger vultures from cattle carcasses thrown by villagers in unused fields, and the vultures were allowed to feed only after the dogs had their fill. No declines were visible for this species which in fact seemed to be increasing as indicated by the large number of juveniles sighted.

White-rumped vulture *Gyps benghalensis* Of the other three species found in the area, individuals of the white-rumped vulture were sighted the most (Table 1). It is now becoming increasingly difficult to spot the species in the districts, the decline seems to have begun towards the end of 1999 or early 2000, and appears to have crashed around mid 2000. (see Table 1). An active nest used to be found on a tree beside the Shiva temple at Sarsai nawar jheel, Etawah district and had been recorded by villagers to be active for the past few decades. This nest was occupied by a pair of wolly-necked storks *Ciconia episcopus* on 20 July 2001 and is symbolic of near disappearance of vultures in the region. A

previously resident, roosting flock around Sarsai Nawar jheel prevalent as recently as January 2001 has also disappeared.

Long-billed vultures *G. indicus* and Red-headed vultures *Sarcogyps calvus* Long-billed *G. indicus* and red-headed vultures *Sarcogyps calvus* were always rare and sight records of these species were mostly in the ravines of the National Chambal Sanctuary where nesting sites also occurred. One nest of a long-billed vulture pair was active near Chakarnagar on the ravines of the National Chambal Sanctuary in June 2001 (R. Chauhan and V.K. Mishra, personal communication, 2001). Two long-billed vultures, one in a nest located on a cliff, probably the same pair seen in June were sighted near Bareh town in the sanctuary in February 2002. Three red-headed vultures were seen together in February 2002 in the sanctuary, while very few individuals were seen outside during the study period. There were no declines visible in the population of these two species.

Discussion

During these observations, the drooping-head phenomenon reported for vultures in Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Prakash 1999), which lies less than 200km west of the study area, was not seen. It would be worthwhile to maintain a continuous vigil on the vultures of the region.

The villagers of the two districts do not directly persecute vultures and application of pesticides in crop fields is restricted. A recent practice has been the direct spraying of large quantities of broad-spectrum pesticides on ponds and lakes while farming water-chestnut (September - January). Previously, naturalists and ecologists used to suspect that run-off from crop fields added pesticides to natural wetlands. Now the direct spraying leaves no doubt that pesticides are contaminating wetlands and the effect on fauna and flora resident in these areas is likely to be immediate and fatal. The cultivation of water-chestnut in this region was restricted in 1999 and 2000, but was observed to expand in an uncontrolled manner from early 2001 onwards, leaving few marshlands and wetlands unaffected. Whether the decline in vulture population in the study area is a consequence of this phenomenon, with the pesticides passing on along the food chain, is anybody's guess, but requires urgent attention.

A direct consequence of the decline of vultures in this predominantly agricultural area has been irresponsible disposal of carcasses of livestock by villagers. Dead cattle previously used to be skinned and dumped in unused fields for vultures to eat them up. The bones then used to be collected to be used in brick kilns and as fertilizer. With the near-disappearance of the *Gyps* vultures, villagers are now increasingly disposing of cattle carcasses by dumping them into canals, a good network of which is prevalent in the two districts, and into the rivers. During fieldwork, I have counted over 150 such carcasses in canals. During visits to the National Chambal Sanctuary in 1999-2001, only a couple of carcasses of cattle were sighted, but during the 2002 survey, I counted 20 cattle, one human and two unidentifiable carcasses in the river. The effects of this unhealthy practice of human health could turn gravely serious if left

unabated. This is an illustration of the reliance of villagers on vultures previously, and the acknowledged and recognized role of these birds as efficient scavengers.

Also, with the disappearance of the larger vultures, dogs and crows will now have an increased supply of food and this will probably result in the growth in numbers of both. Both were seen to be detrimental to the recruitment rate of several large and small water birds that nest on the water or on the ground. While crows were seen to predate on sarus crane *Grus antigone* eggs, dogs were seen to kill pre-fledged sarus young. Eight other species of birds were seen to have their eggs and/or young preyed on by dogs and crows. The impact on the population of scavengers like dogs and crows that also function as predators, due to the decline in vultures has not been a subject of much discussion or interest. At least in this region, several bird species, including one globally threatened species, face increased predation pressures due to secondary effects of decline in vulture numbers. This aspect needs serious consideration by managers and scientists alike.

The rural people of the region, especially the older generation, is acutely aware of the decline in vulture populations. During the 7 Nov. 01 sightings of three white-rumped vultures (Table 1), two villagers from Baralokpur were observed watching the vultures and discussing excitedly if the vultures have begun making a come back. The number of watching villagers grew steadily and was 15 when I rode away.

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Table 1 : Vulture sightings in Etawah and Mainpuri districts, Uttar Pradesh (1999-2000) (NCS National Chambal Sanctuary)

Species/Date	Number	Place of sighting and comments
Scavenger vulture		
14 May 00	c.60	Chakr Nagar, NCS on river bank, with 20 juveniles.
30 Sep 01	26	Near Kudaiyya lake, at cattle carcass, 8 juveniles in flock
07 Nov. 01	51	Off Baralkpur town, at cattle carcass, with White-rumped vultures, two juveniles in flock.
25 Jan. 02	22	NCS survey, Nandgaon to Udi bridge, three juveniles.
26 Jan. 02	8	NCS survey, Udi bridge to Mahua Sunda, three juveniles.
27 Jan. 02	10	NCS survey, Mahua Sunda to Pachnada, two juveniles.
04 Feb. 02	15	NCS survey, Nandgaon to Pinahat
05 Feb. 02	8	NCS survey, Pinahat to Rihan, Agra district
White-rumped vulture		
27 Sep. 99	130+	Bariha town, feeding on cattle carcass on the roadside
27 Dec. 99	2	Sarsai Nawar, on nest, roosting.
23 June 00	45	Sarsai Nawar, soaring + roosting on trees
06 Jan. 01	20	Sarsai Nawar, soaring
10 Jan. 01	35	Sarsai Nawar, soaring + roosting on trees
21 May 01	28	Opposite Sauj Lake, at cattle carcass
17 Aug. 01	1	Sauj Lake, soaring
30 Sep. 01	1	Chopla village, soaring
07 Nov. 01	3	Off Baralokpur town, at cattle carcass
22 Nov. 01	1	Near Baralokpur, on cattle carcass with 4 Scavenger vultures and dogs
Long-billed vulture		
14 May 00	2	NCS, at Chakr Nagar in nest on ravine wall one juvenile
10 Jan. 02	1	Karri town, soaring
27 Jan. 02	2	NCS survey, near Bareh town
Red-headed vulture		
14 Feb. 01	1	Hawai Patti, at Nilgai carcass
18 Apr. 01	1	Near Hardoi Lake, in wasteland
05 Feb. 02	3	NCS survey, Pinahat to Rihan, Agra district

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A Question of Identity - of Bulbuls and Bush Larks

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Howard Howarth of Oregon (U.S.A.) sighted the rare, endemic, yellow-throated bulbul (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus* Jerdon, SYNOPSIS # 1135) amongst the scrub-and-boulder country around the famous ruins of the Vijayanagar Empire at Hampi, near Hospet, in north Karnataka's Bellary District (*NLBW* 42: 84-86; 2002). The *INDIAN HANDBOOK* (6: 94-95 & 9: pl. 100), as I have found it, is not very accurate or complete, but is still the best "summary" of Indian region birds, and readily available. It is astonishing to find however that it tells us very little of juvenile plumages and of nidification (breeding and nesting), other than data copied from the *NEW FAUNA* of Stuart Baker (1922—1930)

on breeding season, nest location, materials and structure, besides the number, size and colour of eggs. The "variant" of the YTB that Howard saw could have only been a juvenile, whose plumage details are not recorded in our reference books. The plates in the "Grimskipp's" *POCKET GUIDE* (pl. 117) and in Kazmierczak's *FIELD GUIDE* (pl. 65), compared with R.A. Richardson's fine painting in the *INDIAN HANDBOOK* (5: pl. 100), are all at variance (!), like most other birds illustrated by these paintings. The *INDIAN HANDBOOK* says that the iris (eye) of the YTB is "brown or orange brown," but the *NEW FAUNA* puts it down as "bright red". Richardson's *INDIAN HANDBOOK*

plate has it red but the others have the eye dark! Only Carl D'Silva's plate in the POCKET GUIDE shows the yellow tail tip and he and Ber van Perlo show the legs and feet black but Richardson has them light grey! This is the problem with paintings, therefore, I see a great future ahead for illustrated bird field guides using good colour photographs, which I plan to select and include myself, when I am ready with synoptic, updated, bird recognition guides for each biogeographical (not political!) area, or sub-area. Incidentally, a good book that wildlife photographers may benefit from consulting is A. A. Baker's (1965) "Photography for scientific publication—A Handbook," published by E.H. Freeman & Co., San Francisco (U.S.A.). I do not know if this Hampi ruins record of the YTB is the first ever from this spot but it is encouraging. And Howard's 78 species in 8 days at Hampi is a little disappointing because I myself saw almost 50 bird species in a single morning's walk in May this year. Perhaps I worked in much better undisturbed habitat across the northern side of the River Tungabhadra. But good work, Howard, and I would be most interested in your bird list from Hampi, and at other places along your Goa to Rollapadu travel "route."

In my paper on the Ornithology of Sandur (1974, *JBNHS* 70: 522-523) I had mentioned early records of the YTB from rocky hills near Bellary in June 1901 by C.L. Wilson, and then from Ramandrug hill top on the Sandur Hills by E.H. Pooler in May 1919. The YTB is a primitive bulbul species, with African relatives of Gondwanan ancestry, and should occur in such dry scrub-and-boulder country all over the Eastern Ghats—Carnatic sub-area (MP+RA+KT; see my Map in Pitta # 122-123: 4; 2001), and may also occur in the Deccan Plateau (BD+TG) sub-area as well, all south of the Tapti—Godavari rivers geographical barrier. The NEW SYNOPSIS, by the way, cited only 18 species of our bulbuls, placed in just 3 genera: *Pycnonotus*, *Criniger* and *Hypsipetes*. In a recent communication of mine to Edward Dickinson (who has apparently completed his manuscript revising the 1984 WORLD CHECKLIST of Howard & Moore and is now working with Rene Dekker, and others, on Asian birds for an intended multi-volume work), I have indicated that a possible maximum of 44 real species of Indian region bulbuls (more if Burma is also included as it should rightly be) may truly exist here and are better placed in 14 distinct genera (homogeneous species-groups). These are the kinds of detailed scientific revisions of our birds' species limits and generic groupings which require to be done urgently. We certainly have many more true species, and endemic, than Sâlim Ali & Ripley had us believe.

Prakash Gole, whose work on the Sahyadris around Poona is well-known, has now thankfully turned his eyes to the "dry hills"—Deccan Plateau ecosystem—around his hometown (*NLBW* 42: 87). Yes, this is the area that has not been surveyed and documented properly still, after the pioneering works of Sykes to Jerdon to Fairbank to Davidson & Wenden to Butler to Macgregor, from 1832 to 1887. Dr Anil Mahabal of the Zoological Survey of India, which has a regional station at Akurdi just outside Poona, has written fine papers on the avifaunas of Poona, Sholapur and Dhulia Districts. Mrs Wright did a paper on the birds of berar in 1942 and all these persons mention only *Mirafra*

erythroptera (# 877), the red-winged bush lark (not "Indian" as recent nomenclature confuses us!). Abdulali's Maharashtra check-list gives also *Mirafra cantillans*, the singing bush lark, but that is easily distinguishable by its almost unspotted upper breast and lack of "floating" down from the air at the end of its song flight. The "Madras Bush Lark" (*M. affinis*) is very similar but has not been found in north-western peninsular India where Maharashtra is located. Per Alström (1998, Forktail, 13: 97-107) discussed the identities of some *Mirafra* larks, but my own research indicates that there may be as many as a dozen distinct species of *Mirafra* here and not just three as documented in the INDIAN HANDBOOK, NEW SYNOPSIS and recent guides. Very unsatisfactory, hardly detailed, taxonomic research and comparative biology studies have been carried out on our polytypic species (with more than one "subspecies") so far, so bird watchers here should be careful about doing IDs just to species level. Late Humayun Abdulali was getting to grips with these slight but constant differences in geographically separated (or even not so!) populations of cryptic or sibling species-complexes and told me at his flat (in Bandra, Bombay) last year that "the fun begins and ends with subspecies." The habitat type is important in correctly placing these difficult species, as well as their distinct calls and song. Gole is right when he points out that none of the "text books" (for us bird students?) mention the habit of a cocked tail of *M. erythroptera*. This is the basic fault of these "general summaries" that such handbooks and guides veritably are. G.M. Henry, however, wrote of *M. ceylonensis* (which is distinct from *affinis*, as Abdulali, 1978, *Spolia Zeylanica*, 32: 141-142 had correctly noted) in his A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON (p. 92; which book had introduced me to bird watching in 1955), that "While walking, or singing, it often carries the tail elevated." Henry's summaries, like those of Whistler in his POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (1928) are much better, in my opinion, than those of others (see Sâlim Ali's fine review of Henry's book in *JBNHS* 53: 451-453; 1956).

I have discussed, in some detail, in my OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITORS OF *BUCEROS* (2002, Humea, field ornithology, # 3, pp. 1-29, map) about our birds' **species limits** and which I am now re-analysing, carefully, using my systematic entomology training (which involved very detailed comparisons, using a microscope and doing dissections of genitalia and other insect body parts)—but very little measurement.

Bird IDs are not at all easy, as the experienced senior Prakash Gole has admitted, so please try and pin your polytypic birds down to the "subspecies," if you can, so we can be reasonably certain of which bird species you really saw. The PICTORIAL GUIDE and FIELD GUIDE do illustrate a few distinct "races" separately, but you will have to also consult the INDIAN HANDBOOK and NEW FAUNA for real help. That is why I appeal to all bird watchers not to depend on Manakadan and Pittie but to please continue using the INDIAN HANDBOOK and NEW SYNOPSIS and "have fun with subspecies" in the field, playing detective, like the great bird diagnostician, late Humayun Abdulali, had dinned into my head before he flew away into the heavens last year.



A Visit to Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and Molem National Park Goa

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Natural beauty of Goa with beautiful golden beaches, and decorated the offshore with an alluring forest eco-system on arrival at Panaji I smelled the existence of the natural forest and it was an opportunity for me to survey the ecosystem of the North Konkan region.

A preliminary discussion with Mr. C. Achalender Reddy, Director, Wildlife and Eco-tourism, Government of Goa and Mr. Francis Lourdes Coelho, Assistant Conservator enabled me to prepare well for making a general survey of the Park.

The Park is 57 km from Panaji, it takes one and half hour drive on National Highway No 4. At Molem we gathered considerable information from the well-maintained Interpretation Centre. We entered the National Park around 8.30 in the morning along with a local guide, binoculars and a Pictorial Guide (Ali & Ripley, 1995). The Molem National Park is situated in the central part of Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary. This area is about 107 km² while Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary is about 133 km². Both the National Park and the Wildlife Sanctuary encompass an area about 240 km² including the rich forest from moist deciduous to evergreen forest types rolling down from the highest ridges of the Western Ghats to the foothills.

The understorey of the forest is very dense. The Sanctuary and National Park largely consists of moist deciduous semi-evergreen and evergreen forest, where the dominant species in the canopy is *Terminalia*. Some of the important tree species are *Hopea* sp, *Missua* (ironwood), *Colophyllum* sp, *Cinnamomum*, *Myrsine*, *Grewia* sp, *Artocarpus* sp. Giant climber/lianas drape the trees. *Entada pursaetha* and *Gnetum* which is a climbing Gymnosperm are found here. Canes too occur frequently and as part of the ground flora some of the medicinal plants are *Abrus precatorius*, *Costus* species, *Rouwolfia serpentina*.

Among the mammalian species Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) is the largest herbivore. According to the Goa forest department the population of the Gaur is about 1500-1600 and perhaps owing to predominance in number, this has been declared as "state animal" by the State Government. Unfortunately we could not see the animal though we heard the call inside the jungle. Among other mammalian species of the forest are panther (*Panthera pardus*), jungle cat (*Felis chaus*), leopard cat (*Felis bengalensis*), lesser Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*), sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*), slender loris (*Loris tardigradus*), flying fox (*Pteropus giganteus*) etc.

We traversed over 5 km within the Molem National Park for bird watching and recorded about 56 bird species. The forest department has built a watch tower and an artificial dyke to create a water hole. I could see a number of birds and many of them were new to me eg. fairy blue bird (*Irena puella*), plain collared or Nilgiri flowerpecker (*Dicaeum concolor*), speckled piculet (*Picumnus innominatus*).

In the afternoon we went to the Range Forest Officer Mr. P.D. Salelkar to discuss the conservation of the area. It appears that the noise pollution is the greatest problem. The National Highway No. 4 passes through the Sanctuary and the South Central Railway crosses 36 km in the Sanctuary and

National Park and the noise caused by passing heavy vehicles and trains has hindered free movement of the animals, and it is a constant source of disturbance to the animals.

Poaching pressure, which was very high in this area earlier seems to have reduced drastically according to forest officials. The local population does not seem to depend much on forest wood as LPG is easily available. Increasing literacy has meant that educated families do not want to use firewood. Perhaps possessing LPG is a status symbol.

There are about 285 human inhabitants in the National Park. The government is concerned about displacing them and it has allocated Rs 1.5 crores in the last financial year for their rehabilitations. Interestingly the inhabitants are also showing some interest in moving out of the sanctuary and national park. The RFO has received only one complaint of paddy field destruction by gaur in the last three years. The efforts of the government of Goa are certainly laudable as far as wildlife conservation is concerned. There is a lack of documentation of the biodiversity. It is important to map and evaluate the biodiversity values of the area. The Goan government plan to introduce eco-tourism in the area, and doing so without a proper study, may be counter-productive.

Acknowledgement

I pay my sincere thanks to Mr. C Achalender Reddy, Director, Wildlife and eco-tourism, Dr. Francis Lourdes Coelho, Assistant conservator of forest, Wildlife and eco-tourism wing, Mr. P. D. Salelkar, Range Forest Officer Wildlife and Eco-tourism, Government of Goa for giving me all possible help.

Table. Check list of the birds of Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary and Molem National Park, Goa.

Common name	Scientific name
Family: Ardeidae	
1. Pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Family: Accipitridae	
2. Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans govinda</i>
3. Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
4. Brahmini kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
5. Indian white backed vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
6. Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Family: Charadriidae	
7. Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
8. Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Family: Columbidae	
9. Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Family: Psittacidae	
10. Bluewinged parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
11. Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Family: Apodidae	
12. Indian edible-nest swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
13. House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Family: Alcedinidae	
14. Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
15. White breasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Family: Meropidae	
16. Chestnut headed bee eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>

17. Green bee eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Family: Bucerotidae	
18. Malabar grey hornbill	<i>Tockus griseus</i>
Family: Capitonidae	
19. Large green barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
Family: Picidae	
20. Speckled piculet	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>
21. Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
22. Heartspotted woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>
23. Pigmy woodpecker	<i>Picoides nanus</i>
Family: Hirundinidae	
24. Wiretailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
25. Red rumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Family: Oriolidae	
26. Black headed oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
27. Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Family: Dicruridae	
28. Bronzed drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
29. Greater racket tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
Family: Corvidae	
30. Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
31. Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Family: Campephagidae	
32. Large cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>
Family: Irenidae	
33. Fairy blue bird	<i>Irena puella</i>
34. Common lora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
35. Gold mantled chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>

Family: Pycnonotidae

36. Ruby throated yellow bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
37. Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
38. Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>
39. Yellow browed bulbu	<i>Hypsipetes indicus</i>
40. Red whiskered bulbi	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>

Family: Muscicapidae

41. Spotted babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
42. Quaker babbler	<i>Alcippe poiocephala</i>
43. Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
44. Brown breasted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>
45. Greenish leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
46. Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
47. Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>

Family: Sittidae

48. Velvet fronted nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
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Family: Motacillidae

49. Forest wagtail	<i>Motacilla indica</i>
50. Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
51. Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>

Family: Dicaeidae

52. Tickells flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
53. Plain coloured flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>

Family: Nectariniidae

54. Purple rumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
55. Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>

Family: Ploceidae

56. Yellow throated sparrow	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>
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REVIEW

PELICANS AND PEOPLE - THE TWO TIER VILLAGE OF KOKKARE, BELLUR, KARNATAKA By K. MANU & SARA JOLLY

(Kalpavriksh and International Institute of Environment and Development)

A case study which is part of a global project called Evaluating Eden, sponsored and coordinated by the International Institute of Environment & Development, London; The South Asia Regional Review of Community Involvement in Conservation which was part of this global project was coordinated by members of the Environmental Action group.

Kalpavriksh : Ashish Kothari, Neema Pathak & Farhad Vania

This excellent booklet is the work of the Environment Research & Action Group called Kalpavriksh – a group interested in studying the relationship between local communities and wildlife management. The present study is a careful description of the interaction between the villagers and the pelicans and storks which occupy their trees every year from December to June.

The history of the mutual dependence between these birds who have lived and bred in the tree tops for centuries (apparently) and the villagers who have lived below on the ground, makes an extraordinary story. The village is some distance from the nearest water bodies, necessary for these fish-eating species – why did they choose this particular village? On their side, the human population not only tolerates them, they welcome them. In practical, material terms the birds' droppings are valuable manure for the farmers, improving the quality and quantity of their crops. There is also, of course, the belief that the birds bring good luck to the village – it is recalled that on the few times the birds failed

to appear, the village suffered – once from drought and once from unexplained series of murders.

The story of Kokkare Bellur has been known to birders ever since 1976 when S. G. Neginhal "discovered it". There are some unusual points about it – as when the whole village had to shift its location and settle a few kilometers away, the birds too decided to move with them; and why do they remain undisturbed by the crackers and noise during festivals and weddings? Even without that tinge of superstition it is obvious that the villagers have a strong feeling of protective affection for the birds. The village panchayat will take strong steps to punish anyone who attempts to disturb them. Among other things, young people rescue the chicks which fall out of their nests, rear them and release them into the wild.

But already there are signs of trouble. As mud of this thatch houses are replaced by brick and tiles, the search for wood grows desperate, and it is difficult to save the large, mature trees which are homes to the birds, from being cut down. The Mysore Amateur Naturalists are addressing such problems with imagination and determination. As with everything in today's world, many of the answers seem to be with money. Protection for a tree can be bought with money. While the Forest Department is willing to pay some protection money in special cases, it is never enough.

Meanwhile, we cannot applaud enough the efforts of the Mysore Amateur Naturalists.

There are two Appendices, both valuable. One relates to the compensation paid by the Forest Department to the villagers for protecting (not cutting down) trees on which the pelicans nest. The second is a list of the 141 species of birds found in Kokkare Bellur with their local, common, and scientific names, their status, including the reference number from the famous Salim Ali/Ripley Handbook.

CORRESPONDENCE

COOTS FOLLOW THE MALLARDS. AAMIR ALI, 14, *che de la Tourella*, 1209 Geneva

Sixteen years ago I wrote an account of how Mallards had arrived on the lake of Champex (Newsletter Vol. XXVI Nos. 9-10, Sept-Oct. 1986 and Vol. XXVIII, Nos 3-4, Mar-April 1988)

Champex is a resort in the Valais Alps, at about 1500 m. with a small lake; that you can walk round in half an hour. There is one sizable bed of reeds and a couple of very small patches. We have been regular visitors to Champex since the end of the 60s and never saw any water fowl in it until 1985. A mallard couple nested there that year and brought up three ducklings. Next year there were several couples nesting; and since then the total population seemed to peak at about 50, including youngsters, and then come down to a more reasonable 25-30.

Once, about 1991, a small flock of black-headed gulls landed on the lake, no doubt surprised to find an unexpected patch of water during a flight. They did not stay long.

In summer, 2001 I was surprised to see a lone coot (*Fulica atra*) skulking among the reeds, keeping well away from the mallards who by this time behaved as if they owned the lake. Perhaps the coots had a mate, but I didn't see it. Perhaps it had, like those gulls, arrived accidentally and would soon disappear.

But in summer 2002, it was there again, with a mate and a youngster (cootling?) which, at an uninformed guess, might have been about ten days old. The juvenile was grey rather than black and had no frontal shield of white. I saw the family regularly for a couple of weeks, always in the same area near the reed bed, while the Mallards sailed all over the lake at will. The youngster was never far from at least one parent. It seems that it takes about 8 weeks for the young to become independent.

One day, there was a flock of about 12 mallards, adults and young nearby. A mallard suddenly shot across and attacked the young coot, who fled and dived. The parent coot, presumably the mother, which was a couple of metres away, charged the Mallard ferociously and the Mallard fled. Peace reigned again. The young coot emerged from the reeds into which it had fled.

On the lake of Geneva, hundreds of coots and mallards (and many others) seem to live together in reasonable harmony. Are the mallards of Champex worried that coots are muscling in on their very limited territory? While the mallards were always ready and eager to gather round and entertain tourists by snapping up pieces of bread thrown out for them, the coots remained aloof from these vulgar expressions of greed and of kowtowing to humans.

Will the coots return next year, perhaps with reinforcements? They are a gregarious species and like true immigrants, will no doubt tell their relatives and friends of the pickings to be had in Champex and urge them to come along. No wonder the mallards are suspicious of them.

Coots are common across Euro-Asian continent, and North Africa, in India they are resident as well as winter visitors.

COLLARED SCOPS OWL. SACHIN PALKAR, Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra, Near D.B.J. College, Chiplun, District Ratnagiri, Maharashtra

There was a Rain Tree (*Samanea saman*) 30m high in the suburban area Ozarwadi, Chiplun District, Ratnagiri. The owner cut the tree on 8th May 2002. Mr. Mangesh Khair, a resident of Ozarwadi, saw a bird near the fallen tree and immediately contacted me. He also saw another bird flying near it. I immediately visited the place and observed the bird. It was an eight to ten days chick, collared scops owl *Otus bakkamoena* and a parent was seen on the tree. There was a nest in a natural hole in the tree at the height of 10 mtr. The chick came out when the tree fell down. The chick was under the branches of the fallen tree and there were two cockroaches near it. When we approached it the chick looked frightened. I made it drink some glucose water and I told Mangesh to keep a watch on it.

I came back home and prepared a box with the use of two drawers and kept some space for the owl to enter. I reached the place at 2030hrs. with the box and silently watched them. The adult owl called 'wut, wut' and the chick was responding in a low voice. After some time one owl came with a cockroach in its beak and sat on a tree. The owl came near the chick to feed it with the cockroach and flew away. Then I went near it with the box and put the chick in it. After ten minutes the owl came back with another cockroach in its beak, but he could not find the chick. Then the owl called 'wut, wut' and the chick responded from the box instantly. The owl sat on the box and located the chick. After a few minutes the owl carefully entered the box. After some time it came out and sat on the box and flew away. After a few minutes another owl came, fed the chick and flew away. I picked up the box from the fallen tree and fixed it on a Jackfruit tree at a height of 5 to 6 mtrs.

Again the owls came, with a house lizard on the fallen tree at the place where I had kept the box. To could not find the box there, so the owl started calling 'wut, wut' and flying here and there. Soon they heard the response of their chick and approached the jackfruit tree. They took rounds around the box and slowly sat on the box looking here and there. After some time it entered the box. Later both owls visited the box alternately for feeding the chick.

For a few days I visited the place every evening. The owls accepted the nest and were seen visiting to feed the chick. An adult owl was seen in the box with its chick in daytime. I observed the chick after ten days and it had feathers. On 30th May the chick flew away. After the owl left, the box was used by a Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis* for its nest. It laid five eggs in the box on 4th, 5th and 8th June. After a month these chicks flew away.

ORIENTAL IBIS. A. RAJARAM, C2, 29, 4th Seaward Road, Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvannamipur, Chennai 600 041.

Two birds with unusual breeding colouration were sighted by me in June this year (2002) and by friend Ramanan in May, 1999. The bird has a red patch on the hind-neck. It has small red wart like spots below the main patch on either side indicating perhaps the possibility that it will spread a further cm or so. When I visited Ranganthitoo in June it was 6 pm and I couldn't

get time to see if there were other birds with the same colouration. The Handbook doesn't mention this feature in the bird nor have I noticed it elsewhere in Southern India. I would like to hear from readers if they have come across such a shiny red patch on the Oriental Ibis elsewhere. Birdwatchers visiting Ranganthittu over the years might have noticed this feature in breeding ibises there.

Breeding colouration is found to vary significantly. Great comorants in southern India usually don't develop the white thigh patches they develop in northern India. Gurusami has written about differences in colouration of breeding birds both in Blackbuck and the Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

It would be worthwhile to keep a lookout for breeding birds with such colouration; they can indicate family relationships and if seen in different places, perhaps their local migrations.

COFFEE ESTATES AND BIRDS. K.R. SETHNA, *Yellikodigi Estate, Aldur P.O. 577111, Chikmagalur dist., Karnataka*

Coffee estates can be good or bad for birds depending on the coffee estates. Coffee estates which use lots of chemicals and pesticides can be very harmful to birds while estates which are organically cultivated or those which use very little chemicals and pesticides can be very beneficial.

Unfortunately there are hardly any coffee estates which are cultivated only organically. My coffee estate is the only truly organically cultivated estate in the district. Naturally, I have an abundance of bird life in my estate. Another factor which is also not very helpful to birds are estates where all or most of the indigenous shade trees are removed for financial gain and the areas are planted with Silver oak (*Grevila robusta*) trees. This in no way helps birdlife. There are estates which use a limited amount of chemicals but still have different varieties of indigenous trees like different kinds of ficus and other fruit bearing trees and these estates are good for birds and have a good variety of them.

Estates which use large quantities of pesticides and other chemicals are responsible for a large number of deaths among fruit eating and insectivorous birds. Birds act as natural enemies against insects and the larger number of birds in an estate would mean less insect problems.

In my organically cultivated estate I have a large variety of bird life. I have raptors, fruit eating birds and large number of insectivorous birds. Some of the raptors I have seen in my estate are - the brown wood owl, barn owl, crested hawk eagle, shikra and many others. Among fruit eating birds - the green barbet, coppersmith, rose-ringed parakeets, blossom headed parakeets, lorikeets, golden orioles, green pigeon, hill mynas, koels and many other kinds. Among insectivorous birds are pitta, scarlet minivets, are golden backed wood peckers, grey jungle fowl, black drongos, racket tailed drongos. The Indian tree pie, gold fronted choloropsis, paradise flycatchers, white cheeked bulbuls, red whiskered bulbuls, redvented bulbuls, yellow cheeked tits, magpie robins, white breasted ground thrush, Tickell's blue flycatchers, verditer flycatchers and many more. I have counted over 80 different birds and I feel there must be many more. All these in only an area of 150 acres!

GUDAVI BIRD SANCTUARY. SHREEPAD HEGDE, *Adkali - Kansur, Sirsi - Kanara, Pin 581 340*

During the monsoon months the magnificent Malenadu forest with the Gudavi Bird Sanctuary attracts thousands birds from far and near, with a waterspread of nearly 30 hectares in a total area of 73-68 hectares. It is located in an absolutely pollution free environment of Gudavi Village with its paddy fields, pineapple and areca gardens as well as an imposing deciduous forest the place is noted for. This bird sanctuary - one among the five such sanctuaries for bird lovers. Located in Shimoga district Gudavi village is really a 'Birders' Paradise.

During 1993 a total of 191 bird species was recorded by a study team of birdwatchers. Of these 63 species were totally or partially aquatic. 10 such species and 3 others breed there in and around the sanctuary. On 24th April, 2002 I joined the North Karnataka Birders Network Study Team to observe the birds of the sanctuary. I recorded 32 species of birds of which three were breeding in the heronry. A total of 8000 birds could be seen and in all probability this number could be more where the birds which had flown out for foraging returned as dusk fell. Among the important species observed were white ibis, egrets- both little and median, spoonbill, cormorant, coot, night heron, Indian shag, darter, little grebe etc. with my binoculars I could spot darter squabs. This was a spectacular view of the darters active nest. The vegetation was made up of fine Karcar, *Kirganelia reticulata*, *Syzguim cumini* *vitex leucoxylong*, *Phyllanthus* sp. etc.

With the tanks full of impounded water, the number of birds visiting the sanctuary peaks during the monsoon. The tanks go dry during summer. Nesting commences with the onset of monsoon which lasts from June to November. Egrets, cormorants, darters and purple herons are the first to start nesting in June and is followed by white ibis and night herons in July. Spoonbills take their turn in September. By the end of November all nesting activity ends and the birds abandon the heronry. In terms of distribution, conservation status etc. of Indian heronries the Gudavi Bird Sanctuary has a prominent position and is the second important place in Karnataka.

Main birds in Gudavi : White ibis, Indian shag (cormorant), little cormorant, darters, grey heron, pond heron, purple heron, night heron, all types of egrets, spoonbill, lesser whistling teal, cotton teal, blue winged teal, coot, pheasant tailed jacana, red wattled lapwing, purple moorhen, little ringed plover, marsh sand piper, pin tail, white breasted water hen, common sand piper and river tern.

Main Facilities at Gudavi : Two watch towers, two tiled roofs, one thatched parabola, small canteen, drinking water, photographic projection etc., with no halting facilities.

How to reach : Sirsi 57 kms. Sorab town is 15 kms. Sagar is the nearest Railway station 47 kms. Mangalore Airport is the nearest airport 270 kms. From Bangalore one has to reach Shimoga, Sorab then Gudavi by bus. There are no frequent bus facilities from Sorab to Gudavi.

NESTING OF BLACK-BELLIED TERN. K.V. ELDOSE, C. SUSANTH KUMAR AND K. RAFAEEK, *Prakriti, Indira Nagar, Peroorkada P.O., Thiruvananthapuram 695 005.*

Black bellied tern *Sterna acuticauda* is a medium sized deeply fork-tailed tern. Smaller and slimmer than the river tern - *Sterna*

aurantia, with orange bill in all plumages. Adult breeding birds have a grey upper breast and chin, black crown, belly and tail coverts. The white tail has long outer feathers. The wings are greyish white all over. Adult non breeding and immature birds have white under parts with varying amount of black speckles and streaked black crown. According to the Asian Water Fowl Census, this tern is considered a threatened species.

The bird is very little known in Kerala. A few sight records are mentioned by Prof. K.K. Neelakantan in his book 'A Book of Kerala Birds'. Mainly confined to the river bed of Bharathapuzha there is only single sighting from kole wetlands in Thrissur district. The breeding behaviour was observed in Pallam in 1993 at the same riverbed. Later in 1996, the same display and mobbing behaviour was seen at Shendurney wildlife sanctuary, Kollam district.

Breeding of the black-bellied tern was recorded in Kerala on 21-01-02 at Mallurkadavu near Kuttipuram at Bharathapuzha river by the first author. He saw the adult birds dipping in water to moisturise the eggs in the nest. Two nests were found that day, one of which contained 3 eggs, the other having 2 chicks.

On 2nd February 2002, the second and third authors with Mr. S. Rajeevan visited the nesting place and found 5 nests. All the nests had 3 eggs each. One dead chick was found near the water. Later they found a live chick of 1-2 days old near the shade of a small grass clump. All the 13 adult birds were in full breeding plumage. The nests were located 6-12m away from each other and at a height of 25-30 cm from the water surface. The size of eggs and nest were measured from photographs. Average size of eggs 28mm x 22mm. The diameter of the nest was 50 mm. The nest was a typical tern nest without any lining inside, just a plain scrape on the loose sand. The shape of the egg was a broad oval very slightly compressed at the smaller end. The colour of the eggs was well matched with the surroundings speckled and blotched all over the greyish brown. The chick was lying flat on the sand with head stretched. It was very difficult to find the chick in these surroundings.

On 2nd February, when approaching the nesting area, the birds flew frantically overhead of the investigators and calling repeatedly. The birds were chasing away Brahminy kites and crows. One or two pairs still engaged in a courtship display. One bird with a fish (about 2" long) appeared. A second bird chased the other. After some fine display of aerobatics, the second one approached the other, face to face, then while hovering, the bird exchanged the fish to the other. This repeated a few times. Then one of them swallowed the fish in mid-air.

Feeding the incubating adult bird at the nest was also observed. During sunny hours the adult birds were seen more at the nest shading the eggs. Occasionally it went to the water and dipped itself to beat the heat of sun to the eggs. The third author has documented some of the activities in film.

On 6th February 2002, Mr. R. Jayaprakash, Mr. R. Murukesh and the second author visited the nesting site and observed the activities. Only one nest had eggs while all others had hatched. Chicks of different stages were observed (varying from more than one week to a few days). Chicks were being fed with fish.

On 26th February 2002, the second and third authors along with Mohan Nilambur and K.A. Kishore visited the area. By now the birds had left the breeding site. Only a pair of adults were seen high up in the sky. We presume that the juvenile birds left the nesting site with adults.

Now we can confirm that this is the first breeding record of the bird from Kerala

Acknowledgment

We are thankful to Mr. S. Rajeevan, R. Jayaprakash, K.A. Kishore, Mohan Nilambur and R. Murukesh members of Warblers and Waders, Thiruvananthapuram for full field support and encouragement.

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OPENBILLED STORK IN KHERI DIST., UTTARA PRADESH,
KRISHNA KUMAR MISHRA, No. 77, Shiv Colony, Canal Road,
Lakhimpur-Kheri 262701.

I had heard that for the past two hundred years these birds arrive here for breeding, and I decided to study their breeding behaviour as well as the features of the habitat where they nested. I found that the nesting took place in a ten hectare plot in Sareli village of Mohammadi Tahseel. I learnt that during the British Raj the village was under the ownership of Jamedar Baldev Prasad, and he strictly protected the birds which numbered as many as 2000 occasionally.

The habitat of Sareli village consists of wet grasslands, agricultural lands, lakes, ponds and reservoirs. In the breeding season from June to September these birds form flocks ranging from 10 to 50 birds of both sexes. In July 2001 there were as many as 241 nests and each nest contained 4 to 5 eggs. Usually the nesting takes place on two sides of the village, but surprisingly in the year 2000 nests were made on only one side of the village. This was because at one stretch all the nesting trees were destroyed due to excessive guano (bird droppings) which are acidic owing to uric acid content.

Here are my findings : In 1999 there were 210 nests, in 2000 there were 195 and in 2001 there were 241 nests. The favoured trees were peepal, neem, tamarind, bamboos and karanj (*Pongamia pinnata*). There were only 4 nests on eucalyptus trees. During the nest building stage the birds were displaying and mating on the nests. The nests were made from the twigs of peepal, bamboo, babul and eucalyptus. The nests were lined with green eucalyptus leaves and it is believed that the aroma of these leaves protects the eggs and the young from insects. But the birds are helpless when the nests are attacked by snakes. In Aug 2001 I saw a rat snake (*Zamenis mucosus*) enter a nest and gobble up all the five eggs.

The young of the open-billed storks are nidicolous and entirely dependent on the parents during their initial days though the eyes seem to be open at birth.

NEW NESTING COLONY OF GREY HERONS (*ARDEA CINEREA*) IN HASSAN DISTRICT, KARNATAKA.

AMEEN AHMED, Ghouse Buildings, Horpet Main Road, Tumkur 572 101, Karnataka, India.

A new nesting colony of grey herons (*Ardea cinerea*) has been recorded for the first time by Ameen Ahmed and Guru Prasad.T.V., members of Wildlife Aware Nature Club (WANC), Tumkur in March 2002. The birds have been nesting on 2 trees within Sannenahalli, a small village in the remote corner of south interior Karnataka. This village located in Gandasi hobli of Hassan district, is about 17 km from Tiptur town (Tumkur district) and approximately the same distance away from Arasikere town (Hassan district). Agriculture is the main occupation of these villagers.

Geographical co-ordinates : Approximately 76°24' E 13° 12' N

Approach from Bangalore : To Tumkur (70 km) then to Tiptur (75km) on Bangalore-Shimoga-Honnavar National Highway. From there travel 9 km south on Hassan road. Deviate west 3 km to Bennenahalli and travel 3 km more to Gurugadahalli. From there Shivara village is 1 ½ km and finally Sannenahalli is 1 km.

Altitude : 830 metres above mean sea level.

Brief details : The birds have been breeding here for the past 5 years, claim the villagers, who also say that their numbers have increased of late. They attribute this rise to the protection afforded by them. The villagers even cite instances where they have prevented people from nearby Tiptur town and Bennenahalli village from poaching these birds. They say although the birds do not help them, they do no harm either. They protect the birds because they are beautiful.

Number of trees and nests : The grey herons are breeding on 2 Peepal trees. While on one tree we counted 36 nests, the other tree had 21 nests.

Feeding : These birds use wetlands surrounding the village for their feeding purpose. In fact the trees on which the birds nest are adjacent to the village tank (man-made wetland). Since this tank dries up in summer the birds also are reported to feed in the nearby Arasikere tank, a big perennial tank that is also home to many other waterfowl including migratory ones.

Ownership of trees : The trees are located on land belonging to the local Anjanaya Temple Trust.

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Other birds : The villagers say apart from grey herons, even little cormorants known as "Neeru Kaage" (water crows in Kannada) come here in December - January to roost. But they supposedly do not breed. During the half hour stay in the village we could also see: Golden oriole, Indian tree pie, house sparrow, pariah kite, house martin and whiteheaded babbler.

UNUSUAL SIGHTING OF PAINTED STORKS AT SINGADHAHALLI KERE CHIKKANAYAKANAHALLI TALUK OF TUMKUR DISTRICT. HARISH R. BHAT, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012.

On 25th July 2002, I had been to Chikkanayakanahalli taluk of Tumkur district in Karnataka. I visited a perennial tank called Singadhaahalli Kere. Though the tank was huge the water level was low due to which many sheep and cattle were grazing on the edges of the tank. At one end of the tank, I could see a big colony of 37 painted storks! It was indeed a marvellous scene to see painted storks in this unusual season! There were about 9 young painted storks with grey colour all over the body, lacking the attractive colours on their head and wings. Their presence answered my curiosity of 'where do the painted storks go after they breed?' Probably, they do not go too far. Instead they locally migrate with their young ones and do come back to the same breeding spots during January and May every year. Along with the painted storks I could also see 10 grey herons, 1 open billed stork, 2 black ibis, 10 little cormorants and 15 egrets. There were 15 unidentified ducks paddling near the edge. The tank proved to be rich with birds life even during the dry season.

INFORMATION ON RAPTORS REQUIRED. GURU PRASAD T.V, Wildlife Aware Nature Club, "Sri Guru Krupa", 9th Cross, Ashok Nagar, Tumkur -572103. Karnataka. Tel: +91 816 254475 Fax: +91-816-275430 Email: vultures@rediffmail.com/guru_tumkur@hotmail.com.

Asian Raptor Research Conservation Network, JAPAN has launched two Projects:

Asian Raptor Migration & Ecology of Indian Black Eagle. In this context a discussion was held at Fraser hills, Malaysia for which I was invited from India and was requested to coordinate for the above two projects in India.

Anyone who is working on the above or who is interested to involve in these projects can contact me at the above mentioned address. The contributor would be duly acknowledged in this endeavour.

Cover : Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*). This sand coloured inornate warbler frequents cultivated paddy and wheat fields and is also partial to long grass and bushes. It makes a curious snapping noise in flight. The bird clammers about the stems, with an awkward flicking movement of its tail. It also flits, creeps and hops erratically in the undergrowth. It sings a loud jingling wheezy song, that often suggests the shaking of a bunch of keys at a distance.

Photo : S. Shreyas



Newsletter for Birdwatchers



The Annual Gathering

The next Annual Gathering of subscribers and supporters of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers will be held on Sunday, the 19th January 2003, at Dodda Gubbi, Bangalore

for further details and registration contact

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